DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 396 117 CE 071 795

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TITLE	Distributive and Procedural Justice as Related to Satisfaction and Commitment.
SPONS AGENCY	Middle Tennessee State Univ., Murfreesboro.
PUB DATE	Apr 96
NOTE	25p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southwestern Psychological Association (Houston, TX, April 1996).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Adults; *Employee Attitudes; *Employer Employee Relationship; Interpersonal Competence; Job Satisfaction; *Justice; Motivation; Organizational Development; *Personnel Evaluation; *Work Attitudes
IDENTIFIERS	*Distributive Justice; *Procedural Justice

ABSTRACT

Randomly selected employees from a Veterans Administration Medical Center (n=200) were asked to complete measures on distributive justice and procedural justice 4 weeks before their performance appraisal; and on job satisfaction, commitment, involvement, and self-reported performance feedback 4 weeks after their performance appraisals. (Distributive justice in an organization deals with the ends achieved [what the decisions are] or the content of fairness, whereas procedural justice is related to the means used to achieve those ends [how decisions are made] or the process of fairness.) The first time, 110 employees completed the survey; the second time, 90 of the 110 employees completed the survey. Results showed that distributive justice was related to satisfaction with pay, promotion, performance appraisal, and commitment, whereas procedural justice was related to satisfaction with supervision, performance appraisal, commitment, and job involvement. Results suggest that managers should apply rules fairly and consistently to all employees and reward employees based on performance and merit without personal bias; then employees will have a positive perception of procedural and distributive justice that may lead to a higher level of satisfaction, commitment, and involvement. (Contains 14 references.) (Author/KC)

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Distributive and Procedural Justice as Related to Satisfaction and Commitment

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ED 396 117

Revised (#5453)

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This research was supported by a Faculty Research Grant from Middle Tennessee State University. The authors would like to thank Alan G. Frost for his suggestions in the design of this study.

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Abstract

A total of 200 randomly selected employees from a Veterans Administration Medical Center was asked to complete measures on distributive justice and procedural justice four weeks before the performance appraisal and on job satisfaction, commitment, involvement, and self-reported performance feedback four weeks after the performance appraisal. Results showed that distributive justice was related to satisfaction with pay, promotion, performance appraisal, and commitment, whereas procedural justice was related to satisfaction with supervision, performance appraisal, commitment, and job involvement.

Distributive and Procedural Justice as Related to Satisfaction and Commitment

For the past two decades, managers in human resources have recognized the important relationship between organizational justice and organizational effectiveness (Cropanzano & Folger, 1991). There are two forms of organizational justice: Distributive justice and procedural justice. Distributive justice deals with the ends achieved (what the decisions are) or the content of fairness, whereas procedural justice approaches is related to the means used to achieve those ends (how decisions are made) or the process of fairness.

Factors Related to Perceived Fairness

The practice of performance appraisals has been the major concern for early studies of procedural justice. The perceptions of the fairness of performance evaluations are related to managerial and professional employees' opportunities to express their feelings, the existence of a formal appraisal program, the supervisor's knowledge of the subordinate's performance, the existence of action plans to improve performance weaknesses, and the frequency of evaluations. There are several additional criteria related to fairness, such as: supervisors' ability to suppress bias, create consistent allocations, rely on accurate information, be correctable, represent the concerns of all recipients, and focus on prevailing moral and ethical standards.

Greenberg (1986) suggested that soliciting input prior to evaluation and using it, two-way communication, ability to

challenge/rebut evaluation, rater familiarity with ratee's work, and consistent application of standards are related to the procedural dimension. Receipt of rating based on performance achieved and recommendation for salary/promotion based on rating are related to the distributive dimension.

Further, employees' trust in management has also received a lot of attention (Fulk, Brief, & Barr, 1985). Other researchers suggested the existence of five criteria related to the perceived fairness of treatment in organizations: adequately considering others' viewpoints, suppressing personal biases, consistently applying decision-making criteria, providing timely feedback about decisions, and adequately explaining the basis for decisions.

Justice and Other Work-Related Variables

It has been argued that distributive justice predicts satisfaction with the outcome received (i.e., pay satisfaction), whereas procedural justice influences the evaluation of the organization and its authorities (i.e., trust-in-supervision and organizational commitment) (Cropanzano & Folger, 1991). Further, if employees can be guaranteed fair procedural treatment, they are more likely to become loyal organizational members, a sign of organizational commitment. Under fair procedural justice, it is more difficult to question the outcomes that have resulted (distributive justice). Distributive justice accounted for more unique variance in pay satisfaction, a personal-level evaluation, than procedural justice.

Sweeney and McFarlin (1993) found that distributive justice predicts personal-level evaluations (e.g., pay satisfaction) whereas procedural justice affects organizational-level evaluations (e.g., organizational commitment). In that study, only one variable was employed for distributive justice, procedural justice, job satisfaction, and commitment. All measures were obtained in one survey.

The Present Study

The major purpose of the present study was two fold: First, we compiled a questionnaire to measure distributive and procedural justice related to performance appraisal. The factor structures of the questionnaire were investigated. Second, we measured perceived distributive and procedural justice before the performance appraisal (Time 1) which were used to predict several aspects of satisfaction (i.e., pay, promotion, and supervisor), self-reported performance rating, satisfaction of performance appraisal, commitment (i.e., Organizational Commitment Questionnaire [OCQ], Porter, Steers, Mowday, & Boulian, 1974; Index of Organizational Commitment [IOC], Hrebiniak & Alutto, 1972), and job involvement (Lodahl & Kejner, 1965) measured after the formal performance appraisal (Time 2). Following the suggestions by Sweeney and McFarlin (1993), we predicted that distributive justice will be related to pay satisfaction. On the other hand, procedural justice will be related to different measures of commitment.

It is also plausible that the relationship between distributive justice and job satisfaction may be different for

different criterion variables, such as satisfaction with pay, promotion, supervision, and performance appraisal. Further, the relationship between procedural justice and commitment may be different for different measures of commitment such as the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (Porter et al., 1974), Index of Organizational Commitment (Hrebiniak & Alutto, 1972), and job involvement (Lodahl & Kejner, 1965). Since very little research is available concerning the effects of different measurement scales as related to distributive and procedural justice, all of these variables will be examined on an exploratory basis.

Method

Participants

A total of 200 employees was randomly selected from a Veterans Administration Medical Center located in the southeastern United States with 1,200 employees. A survey questionnaire was given to these 200 employees four weeks before (Time 1) and four weeks after (Time 2) receiving their formal performance appraisal. Employees returned completed surveys directly to the researchers.

At Time 1, 110 employees (64 females and 46 males) out of 200 completed the survey. The response rate was 55 percent. At Time 2, 90 employees (54 females and 36 males) out of 110 completed the survey. The response rate at Time 2 was 81.8 percent. The overall response rate was 45 percent (90 out of 200). There were no significant differences between those who did and did not respond

at Time 2. Subjects' demographic variables are presented in Table 1.

Measures

Distributive Justice. Distributive and procedural justice were measured four weeks before the performance appraisal (please see Table 2 for all these items). We adopted a 5-item distributive justice scale based on previous works (Curry, Wakefield, Price, & Mueller, 1986). These five questions deal with the extent to which employees have been fairly rewarded given five general factors: responsibilities, education and training, effort, stresses and strains, and work. For example, employees were asked: How fair has the organization been in rewarding you when you consider the amount of effort that you put forth? A 5-point scale with very unfairly (1) to very fairly (5) as anchors was employed.

Procedural Justice. The procedural justice measure involved 22 items. These 22 items were adopted based on suggestions in the literature related to procedural justice (Duggan, Frost, Woods, & Wilson, 1989), frequency of evaluation (Fulk et al., 1985), supervisor's knowledge of subordinate's performance (Fulk et al., 1985), and trust (Fulk et al., 1985).

Job Satisfaction. The following scales were measured four weeks after the performance appraisal. Three aspects of job satisfaction were measured using the Job Descriptive Index [JDI] (Smith, Kendall, & Hulin, 1975): Satisfaction with pay, promotion, and supervision. The Cronbach's alpha for each scale is presented in Table 1.

Self-Reported Performance Feedback. Pearce and Porter (1986) asked employees "What was your annual performance appraisal rating last year?" with the following five choices: "outstanding," "highly successful," "successful," "satisfactory," and "unsatisfactory". In the present study, a 5-point scale with the same five anchors were used, e.g., "outstanding" (5), "unsatisfactory" (1), etc. Since the self-reported feedback was measured only four weeks after the formal feedback, the statement was slightly modified to reflect the timing of the performance evaluation.

Satisfaction with Performance Appraisal. Satisfaction with performance appraisal was measured by 12 items. Some sample items are listed as follows: My performance has been fairly and accurately evaluated. I think evaluations are handled fairly in this organization. I am satisfied with my last evaluation/ appraisal. The Cronbach's alpha of this scale was .97.

Commitment and Involvement. Two measures of commitment were adopted for the present study: the 15-item Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ, Porter et al., 1974) and the 4-item Index of Organizational Commitment measure (IOC, Hrebiniak & Alutto, 1972). Further, the short 6-item job involvement scale (Lodahl & Kejner, 1965) was also included.

Results

Measurement of Distributive and Procedural Justice

The means, standard deviations, the number of items, Cronbach's alpha, and correl- ions of variables are presented in

Table 1. Data of distributive justice (5 items) and procedural justice (22 items), a total of 27 items obtained from a sample of 110 employees, were analyzed using a principal components factor analysis. Using a criterion of eigenvalues greater than one, followed by the varimax rotation, six factors were identified.

Table 2 shows that Factors 1, 3, 4, 5, and 6 were related to procedural justice, whereas Factor 2 reflected distributive justice. The five factors of procedural justice obtained in the present study were similar to a pilot study using the same 22-item procedural justice measure in a sample of 207 employees of a national insurance company (Duggan et al., 1989). More specifically, Factor 1 had six items which accounted for 42.9 percent of the variance and reflected general fairness (please see Table 2). Factor 2 can be labeled as distributive justice.

Factor 3 revealed the two-way communication between the supervisor and the subordinate during the performance appraisal process. Factor 4 was associated with the amount of trust in supervisor. Factor 5 covered the clarity of the performance appraisal process. Finally, Factor 6 concerned about the subordinates' understanding of the performance appraisal system. The Cronbach's alphas for these six factors are presented in Table 1.

Justice And Other Work-Related Variables

Based on the results of factor analysis, the distributive justice (Factor 2) and procedural justice (Factors 1, 3, 4, 5, and 6)(measured at Time 1) were used to predict subsequent job

satisfaction (pay, promotion, and supervision), self-reported performance appraisal rating, satisfaction of performance appraisal, commitment (OCQ and IOC), and job involvement (measured at Time 2) using multiple regression procedures. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 shows that if employees had a favorable perception regarding distributive justice, then they tended to have a high level of both pay satisfaction and promotion satisfaction [R square change = .08866, F change = 10.51, p = .0016; R square change = .08852, F change = 10.49, p = .0016, respectively]. Employees who showed high confidence and trust in their supervisors and had clear expectations of the performance appraisal process tended to have a high level of satisfaction with supervision.

Insert Tables 1, 2, and 3 about here

Their feelings of fairness and clarity of performance appraisal process were also associated with high scores of self-reported performance appraisal rating. Satisfaction with the performance appraisal can be predicted by employees' feeling towards trust and distributive justice which were measured before performance appraisal. Both Commitment measures (OCQ and IOC) could be predicted by distributive justice. Further, perceived fairness lead to commitment measured by OCQ, whereas understanding of the performance appraisal system lead to commitment measured by IOC. Finally, the understanding of the performance appraisal

system predicted job involvement after the performance appraisal.

Discussion

In the present study, employees were randomly selected from a Veterans Administration Medical Center located in the southeastern United States. The distributive justice and procedural justice measures were obtained four weeks before the performance appraisal, whereas job satisfaction, self-reported performance appraisal ratings, satisfaction of performance appraisal, and commitment, and job involvement were measured four weeks after the performance appraisal.

The first primary purpose of this study is to identify the major components (factors) of distributive and procedural justice. Our factor analysis results suggest that there is one factor related to the distributive justice. Further, there are five clearly identified factors (aspects) of procedural justice: fairness, two-way communication, trust in supervisor, clarity of expectations, and understanding of the performance appraisal process.

This distributive justice factor in this study is very similar to the one used by Sweeney and McFarlin (1993). The procedural justice measure in the Sweeney and McFarlin (1993) study has only four items and one factor. Therefore, the present study has revealed several important aspects of the procedural justice.

The second major purpose of our study is to investigate the relationship between procedural and distributive justice and other work-related variables. Our findings suggest that distributive

justice is significantly related to satisfaction with pay, satisfaction with promotion, satisfaction with the performance appraisal, and two measures of organizational commitment (OCQ and IOC). Further, different aspects of procedural justice (i.e., fairness, trust in supervisor, clarity, and understanding of the performance appraisal process) are related to satisfaction with supervision, self-reported performance appraisal rating, satisfaction with performance appraisal, both measures of commitment, and job involvement. It appears that both distributive and procedural justice seem to be very important in predicting employees' subsequent personal satisfaction and commitment to the organization.

Our results clearly support the notion that there are several factors related to employees' perceptions of procedural and distributive justice which are related to different aspects of satisfaction, organizational commitment, and involvement. It is plausible that managers have some "control" over employees' perceptions of procedural and distributive justice which, in turn, may have significant impacts on employees satisfaction, commitment and involvement in organizations.

Managers and practitioners may simply want to examine all the factors and also the items listed in Table 2 and ask themselves the same questions: What have you done for your employees concerning the different aspects of procedural and distributive justice lately? What have you done to improve all these area in order to

satisfy employees' needs and improve their commitment and involvement?

One key aspect of these factors is communication. Employees need to know their job duties and responsibilities clearly before they get started. Managers may want to express their view of goals, values, expectations, and organizational culture and may discuss possible changes of these ideas over time. Orientation training, realistic job preview, and formal and informal socialization process for employees may enhance this process. It has been suggested, in one study, that employees did not report 30 percent of the tasks supervisors said were part of their jobs. Therefore, it is possible that there are major differences between managers and employees' perceptions of employees' job duties and responsibilities.

Managers also need to establish two-way communications, identify the needs, desires, and expectations of employees, help them to achieve their goals and objectives, recognize their achievement and accomplishments, provide feedback to employees, and allow employees to provide input and tell their side of the stories. Performance appraisal criteria and possible reward should be expressed explicitly and clearly. Therefore, the rules of the game can be understood by all employees.

Frequent communication may further enhance employees' understanding of the process, improve their performance, and their trust in managers. All these factors are related to procedural justice of performance appraisal.

If managers can apply rules fairly and consistently to all employees and reward employees based on performance and merit without personal bias, then employees will have a positive perception of procedural and distributive justice which may lead to a higher level of satisfaction, commitment, and involvement. When the rules are applied fairly, it will be difficult to challenge the consequences or the final results.

Besides procedural and distributive justice, "sensitivity to others" has been identified as one of the most important dimensions of interpersonal skills for managers (Hogan, 1995). That is, besides "what" information is provided to employees, more attention should be focused on "how" information is presented.

Moreover, even a manager is presenting the same information to employees, however, employees may respond differently to the same information depending on their own personality, personal values, perceptions, and attitudes. Thereby, managers need to possess skills in understanding employees' intentions and their individual differences regarding values and attitudes, communicate to employees clearly, respect their wishes, and project courtesy and friendliness in the process. Thus, all possible interactions between the supervisor, employees, and the organizational culture should be examined closely in the future.

Recently, Folger (1995) labeled it as "the Churchill Effect" in examining the importance of interpersonal skills in interaction and communication. It was based on an argument presented by

Churchill: "If you have to kill a man, it costs you nothing to be polite".

Thus, in the performance appraisal process, both the "content" of the message (what message is presented) and the "presentation" of a message (how the message is presented) will make a difference. When managers treat employees with respect and talk to them "politely", they will have nothing to lose even the "end results" may be exactly the same (i.e., to give an employee poor performance evaluations or to lay off an employee). When employees are treated with respect, they will not be angry at the manager and the company and are less likely to retaliate by using destructive tactics against the management, the company, and the public (Tang & Fuller, 1995). There is much that managers can do in this area.

Although we collected our data from employees at one VA Medical Center, it is plausible that employees in other organizations, public or private, will be looking for the same kind of fair treatment from their supervisors and the organization. Future research may want to investigate whether the present findings will be generalizable to other types of organizations.

Sweeney and McFarlin's (1993) findings support the two-factor model which suggests that distributive justice predicts personal-level evaluations (e.g., pay satisfaction) whereas procedural justice affects organizational-level evaluations (e.g., organizational commitment). However, the present findings are not as clear cut as the Sweeney and McFarlin's study (1993). The different measures and statistical methods used in their study and

the present study may contribute to the different findings. It appears that the two-factor model tested in Sweeney and McFarlin's (1993) study needs to be investigated in future studies. Moreover, different measures and statistical methods should be employed to further verify these results.

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Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, Number of Items, Cronbach's Alphas, and Correlations

Variables	M	SD	Number of Items	Alpha	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
1. Age	40.83	9.12			18*	-00	42*	32*	-16*	31*	07	16	28*	12	06	-02	-08	22*	10	09	25*	-02
2. Sex (Male = 1, Female = 0)						09	21*	22*	-08	-04	-12	-16*	-11	-03	-00	-06	-15	-00	-07	-13	02	02
3. Education	14.00	2.09					11	10	24*	-22*	-08	-19*	-14	-16*	06	-26*	-08	-03	-12	-24*	-14	-09
4. Tenure (Org.)	9.57	6.68						70*	-20*	09	03	03	-05	11	03	-07	08	26*	19*	05	31*	06
5. Tenure (Job)	5.89	5.27							-16*	09	-04	01	02	05	18*	-08	08	35*	15	-06	20*	-02
6. Distributive	15.97	5.99	5	.95						-49*	-36*	-41*	-27*	-37*	-34*	-34*	-30*	-14	-41*	-50*	-46*	15
7. Fairness	23.63	7.91	7	.95							59*	62*	50*	62*	33*	27*	43*	30*	43*	52*	45*	-12
8. Communication	16.14	5.73	6	.92								62*	25*	57*	23*	20*	49*	21*	42*	36*	28*	-18
9. Trust	14.35	3.78	4	.87									25*	67*	16	24*	61*	15	48*	43*	37*	-18
10. Clarity	9.71	2.90	3	.82										18*	21*	16	-02	-07	03	28*	21*	-16
11. Understanding	11.29	3.03	3	.74											30*	25*	48*	26*	46*	38*	51*	-29*
12. Pay	27.82	15.66	9	.84												27*	23*	08	20*	33*	35*	-18*
13. Promotion	16.74	17.26	9	.90													36*	07	30*	60*	44*	-35*
14. Supervision	38.46	13.66	14	.87														21*	48*	47*	39*	-35*
15. Self-Reported	3.87	.69	1	--															57*	19*	41*	-08
16. Satisfaction	51.11	22.30	12	.97																46*	52*	-20*
17. OCQ	64.96	17.84	15	.92																	64*	-41*
18. IOC	14.15	3.70	4	.88																		-32*
19. Involvement	16.95	2.61	6	.72																		

Note. Variables 1-11 (Time 1), N = 110, variables 12-19 (Time 2), N = 89. All decimals have been omitted for correlations. *p < .05.

Justice

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Table 2

Factor Loadings for the Distributive and Procedural Justice Scale

Variables	Loading
Factor 1: Fairness (Variance = 42.9%, Alpha = .95)	
1. How much to you feel your last performance rating truly represented how well you have performed in your job?	.84
2. How fair do you feel your last performance appraisal was?	.83
3. How accurately do you feel your performance has been evaluated?	.78
4. How justified do you feel your supervisor was in his/her last rating of your performance?	.71
5. How much do you feel that your last performance rating was free from bias?	.69
6. If you have been evaluating your own performance, how similar would your rating have been to the last one that your supervisor gave to you?	.58
Factor 2: Distributive Justice (Variance = 10.5%, Alpha = .95)	
7. How fair has the organization been in rewarding you when you consider the amount of effort that you have put forth?	.89
8. How fair has the organization been in rewarding you when you consider the responsibilities that you have?	.88
9. How fair has the organization been in rewarding you when you consider the stresses and strains of your job?	.87
10. How fair has the organization been in rewarding you when you take into account the amount of education and training that you have	.83
11. How fair has the organization been in rewarding you when you consider the work that you have done well?	.82
Factor 3: Two-Way Communication (Variance = 8.9%, Alpha = .92)	
12. How often is the progress toward your goals set in previous appraisal meetings reviewed by your supervisor with you?	.85
13. How much guidance does your supervisor give you about how to improve your performance?	.80
14. How much input does your supervisor ask for during the appraisal process?	.77
15. How much does your supervisor sit down and discuss with you the results of your performance evaluation?	.76
16. How often does the performance appraisal process at your organization result in specifications of new goals?	.73
17. How much opportunity are you given to express your feelings when your performance is evaluated?	.55

Table 2 Continued

Variables	Loading
Factor 4: Trust (Variance = 5.9%, Alpha = .87)	
18. How competent do you feel your supervisor is to evaluate your job?	.80
19. How familiar is your supervisor with the details and responsibilities that your job entails?	.79
20. To what extent do you have confidence and trust in your immediate supervisor regarding his/her general fairness?	.63
21. How much to you trust your supervisor to accurately report your performance to his/her supervisor?	.61
Factor 5: Clarity (Variance = 4.6%, Alpha = .82)	
22. How clear was it made to you when you were hired that the results of your performance evaluation would be tied to certain personnel actions (i.e., pay raises, promotions, terminations, etc.)?	.82
23. When you were hired, how much information was given to you about the performance appraisal criteria used for your evaluation?	.81
24. How clear was it, when you were hired, that your performance would be periodically evaluated?	.77
Factor 6: Understanding (Variance = 3.7%, Alpha = .74)	
25. How well do you understand the performance appraisal process at your organization?	.76
26. How free to you feel to discuss job-related problems with your supervisor?	.64
27. How comfortable do you feel expressing your feelings to your supervisor during the appraisal process?	.52

Note. N = 110.

Table 3

Distributive and Procedural Justice as Related to Satisfaction, Performance Appraisal, Commitment, and Involvement

Dependent Variable (Time 2)	Independent Var. (Time 1)	R Square Change	F Change	p
1. Pay (JDI)	Distributive	.08866	10.51	.0016
2. Promotion (JDI)	Distributive	.08852	10.49	.0016
3. Supervision (JDI)	Trust	.29315	44.79	.0000
	Clarity	.02684	4.22	.0423
4. Self-Reported Rating	Fairness	.06074	6.98	.0094
	Clarity	.04407	5.27	.0237
5. Satisfaction	Trust	.17816	23.41	.0000
	Distributive	.04070	5.58	.0200
6. Commitment (OCQ)	Distributive	.19290	25.81	.0000
	Fairness	.06176	8.87	.0036
7. Commitment (IOC)	Understanding	.20355	27.60	.0000
	Distributive	.06196	9.03	.0033
8. Involvement	Understanding	.06816	7.90	.0059

Dr. Tang's current research focus on the relationship of the money ethic to work motivation and on other employee issues such as job satisfaction and turnover. Ms. Sarsfield-Baldwin is a graduate student in Industrial and Organizational Psychology at Middle Tennessee State University.